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LOCAL IDENTITY AS A DETERMINING FACTOR OF CITTASLOW CITY DEVELOPMENT BASED ON THE EXAMPLE OF LIDZBARK WARMIŃSKI

TOŻSAMOŚĆ LOKALNA JAKO DETERMINANTA ROZWOJU MIASTA CITTASLOW NA PRZYKŁADZIE LIDZBARKA WARMIŃSKIEGO

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Summary: The article deals with the role and significance of local identity in city development. The Cittaslow movement is a concept promoting city development based on a strong bond between the inhabitants and the given area, Lidzbark Warmiński being one of the first Polish cities to join the network. However, the implementation of the Cittaslow model may be more difficult in the region of Warmia and Mazury, due to historical factors, among others. These circumstances prompted conducting a survey among the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński, the main aim of which was to determine whether, in their opinion, participation in the Cittaslow network influenced their subjective sense of local identity.

Keywords: local identity, city development, Cittaslow, Lidzbark Warmiński.

Streszczenie: W artykule poruszono problematykę odnoszącą się do roli i znaczenia tożsamości lokalnej w rozwoju miasta. Koncepcją, która propaguje rozwój opierający się na poczuciu silnej więzi mieszkańców z danym obszarem, jest ruch Cittaslow, a jednym z pierwszych miast, które dołączyło do sieci w Polsce, jest Lidzbark Warmiński. Realizacja modelu Cittaslow może być jednak dość utrudniona na obszarze województwa warmińsko-mazurskiego, co wynika m.in. z czynników historycznych. Uwarunkowania te stały się podstawą do przeprowadzenia badań ankietowych wśród mieszkańców Lidzbarka Warmińskiego. Ich głównym celem było uzyskanie odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy według mieszkańców uczestnictwo miejscowości w sieci Cittaslow wpłynęło na ich subiektywne odczuwanie tożsamości lokalnej.

Słowa kluczowe: tożsamość lokalna, rozwój miasta, Cittaslow, Lidzbark Warmiński.

1. Introduction

Local identity is currently seen by many cities as a chance to stimulate endogenous capital, and, consequently, economic development. Strengthening that identity, however, is a complex and multifaceted issue. The situation is especially difficult in the case of small cities, some of which face many social and economic problems. Historical factors play a role in their situation as well. In recent years in Poland, (especially in the region of Warmia and Mazury) support has been growing for the Cittaslow concept, which promotes small city development through strong local identity of its inhabitants.

Lidzbark Warmiński was one of the first cities to join the Slow network in Poland. The city has been experiencing rapid development in recent years, which was tied to implementing the membership requirements. Lidzbark Warmiński can be considered as an unofficial local leader in promoting the idea of ‘good living’. This makes it a good place to research the opinions of the local inhabitants on their sense of local identity. The inhabitants’ sentiment is crucial in this matter, since they are the main recipients of all actions and initiatives. They therefore subjectively assess those undertakings and consequently determine their effectiveness.

The purpose of the conducted survey was to establish whether, according to the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński, participation in the Cittaslow network has influenced the subjective perception of local identity, and what its role in the development of the city is. The length of time since joining the structure seems to afford a good opportunity for this research, since the inhabitants may be able to accurately assess the developments in the longer perspective.

2. Local identity as a factor in city development

‘Identity’ is expressed in Polish by a word whose primary meaning is “sameness” [*tożsamość*]. In reference to a community it can be interpreted as awareness of common traits and a sense of unity [*Wielki słownik...* 2018]. In this context, local identity is especially important, since it is a “real” identity, i.e. based on a strong biological bond, consanguinity, native and indigenous culture, a sense of connectedness with a personal homeland, parish, village, or region [Palczyński 2008, p. 20-23, 50]. This identification is very often found at the level of cities.

There are many definitions of territorial identity in the literature.¹ For instance, C.L. Miranda and A.R. Adib define it as “the collective recognition of an intricate meshing of characteristics and components specific to a given social fabric, unique

¹ Many researchers cited in this article refer to a broader scope of identity relating to one’s surroundings, such as regional, or territorial, etc. Local identity and regional identity are kinds of territorial identity of a pre-national type [Palczyński 2008, p. 50]. With this in mind, this author limits his discourse to local identity pertaining to the city, although the cited sources may refer to larger territories (e.g. regions). To a large extent, though, the discussed aspects are successfully transferable to city level.

to the inhabitants of a spatial unit and determined by its particular resources and the environmental, political-institutional, economic and sociocultural dimensions” [Miranda, Adib 2007, p. 43]. On the other hand, N. Ujang stresses the connection between local identity and the perception of people regarding their surroundings [Ujang 2012, p. 156]. In the opinion of F. Pollice, identity can also be defined as the essence of the place itself, since it is a crucial component of a given area, making it different from the geographic aspect [Pollice 2003, p. 112]. Local identity is created both in real, specific social relationships and in symbolic relations. It can take the form of identification with the given place and its people [Rembowska 2000, p. 3]. As G. Raagmaa observes, it is expressed in many ways. It can be as simple as regional inferiority complex or regional pride. However, as the author stresses, a more intense identity is expressed through a certain sense of belonging [Raagmaa 2002, p. 58].

Nowadays, regional identity is especially relevant for urban planning, city marketing, and improving competitiveness, since regions have been recognised as a key catalyst of economic development [Passi 2013, p. 1207]. It is currently accepted that social relations are an important factor determining a region’s potential for further development [Dredge, Jenkins 2003, p. 387]. In this aspect, territorial (local) identity, based on attachment to the given place and on the emotional sentiments of the inhabitants increasing their motivation to act for the betterment of the socio-economic situation, seems to be a crucial phenomenon influencing local development. A. Raszkowski, having analysed the literature on the subject, points out a number of aspects linking territorial identity and the process of local development [Raszkowski 2014, pp. 37-40]:

- Social values, which are influenced by identity enhancing the locally felt ethical and behavioural aspects.
- Inter-generational transfer of knowledge and experience.
- A sense of belonging which knits the local socio-economic system together.
- Self-reproduction, which refers to strong relations between economic activities and the region.
- Careful implementation of external knowledge and solutions, manifesting in selective perception and absorption of external stimuli.
- Promotion of territorial resources, i.e. popularising one’s place of residence.
- Quality and effectiveness of local politics, i.e. raising the level of political consensus.
- Sustainable development, influenced by local identity in the way of sentimental attachment of the community to the landscapes, natural environment, and the cultural values surrounding it.
- Creativity of the community and engagement in pro-growth initiatives which result from a high level of territorial identity.
- City brand, which is tied to local identity by increasing prestige and sense of belonging to the place of residence.

As is evident from the discussion above, an important role in outlining the city's development strategy, or its image, based on the bond between the inhabitants and the given region and its traditions, falls to the local government [Konecka-Szydłowska 2011, p. 156]. As observed by A. Stanowicka, municipal authorities shaping an identity strategy must identify all of its determinants, together with the factors influencing the city's image. Impulses which serve to strengthen the bond with the city are subjectively selected and organised by the inhabitants [Stanowicka 2016, pp. 2-5]. Creating a regional identity is an intrinsically social, spatial and historical (cultural) process.

The process of building a regional identity is thus a complex and multi-faceted issue. The situation is especially difficult in the case of small cities, some of which face many social and economic problems, as well as significant disparities in terms of income and standard of living [Jeziarska-Thöle, Gwiaździńska-Goraj 2011, p. 168]. In recent years in Poland (especially in the region of Warmia and Mazury), support has been growing for the Cittaslow concept, which promotes small city development through strong local identity of its inhabitants.

3. The Cittaslow idea and local identity in the cities of the region of Warmia and Mazury

The Cittaslow strategy aims for local economic development based, among others, on a robust indigenous community, viability, justice and equal opportunities for growth, while the rule is to promote the inhabitants' quality of life² [Mierzejewska 2009, p. 208]. Local identity is therefore especially vital to this model of development and can be viewed from two perspectives.

Firstly, the inhabitants' identity matters as a determining factor for the effective implementation of the Cittaslow idea. This strategy is mainly aimed at the endogenous capital in the given municipality. The network's member cities are viewed both as models of local management and a social movement, since they develop thanks to the projects, actions and events undertaken at all levels [Baldemir, Kaya, Sahin 2013, p. 76]. Both citizens and local leaders emphasize regional history and use the unique context present locally for sustainable development [Mayer, Knox 2006, p. 322]. Consequently, the role of the inhabitants, understood as their awareness and mobilisation, is extremely important. The movement also promotes the inter-generational transfer of embodied abilities. Experience and its transfer to new generations foster closer ties between local producers and consumers [Pink 2008, p. 98].

Secondly, strengthening local identity may be seen as the goal of the strategy. It is often argued that a valid socio-political response to homogenisation is focusing on local aspects, whereby communities with similar worldviews may reassert their

² For more on Cittaslow principles, see Grzelak-Kostulska et al. [2011] and Zadęcka [2018].

identities and interests in relation to other communities [Dredge, Jenkins 2003, p. 385]. Urban development is currently associated mostly with the hustle and bustle of big cities, unprecedented civilizational progress and encroaching globalisation. Without denying the opportunities and benefits brought about by these processes, one must also recognise the accompanying risks. There is the risk of losing values such as tradition and social relations, and of the disintegration of the urban environment, which disrupts the bond between the given place and the individual.

In the case of the Polish 'good living cities' network,³ and especially among the cities of the region of Warmia and Mazury, these aspects encounter serious impediments. A. Jaszczak emphasizes that development based on local identity is relatively easy for cities where historical continuity has been maintained, whereas it can be quite difficult where this continuity was interrupted in a natural or forceful way [Jaszczak 2015, pp. 75-77]. Many Polish cities (especially in the north-east of the country) have experienced significant destruction of their most valuable and unique architecture due to the war and its historical aftermath in the subsequent few decades. The unique landscapes defined by the characteristic architectural forms have been largely lost. The historical, cultural and social continuity of these places has been disrupted [Salm 2017, p. 75]. Another important aspect is the way in which the local identity was rebuilt. The state, characterised by strong centralism, valued this principle positively, in contrast to regionalism or localism, which were considered obsolete concepts, synonyms of egoism, and expressions of detrimental group interest. Education, which had an indoctrinating role in the socialist state, weakened local identities through uniform curriculums, especially in the younger generation [Rembowska 2000, p. 4]. The disruption of local identity in the former territories of East Prussia was also exacerbated by resettlements. Many cities were populated almost entirely by new arrivals, many resettled by force.

Cittaslow is one way to strengthening local identity, although the idea has been introduced only recently in most cities. Therefore, in assessing the Slow movement's overall effect in Poland, it is difficult to form definite conclusions or calculate measurable benefits. Instead it is advisable to focus on individual cities, preferably those who have been participating in the network the longest and have accumulated some experience in implementing the objectives of 'good living cities'. Lidzbark Warmiński was one of the first Polish cities to join.

³ The Polish Cittaslow network is comprised of 28 cities, of which the majority (20) are in the region of Warmia and Mazury (as of November 2018).

4. Characteristics of Lidzbark Warmiński and local identity-building initiatives

Lidzbark Warmiński lies in the northern part of the region of Warmia and Mazury. The population, as of 31 December 2017, is given as 15,877 inhabitants.⁴ Lidzbark Warmiński is a cultural melting pot which, due to historical changes culminating in the 19th and 20th century, was settled by people of many ethnicities – mainly Masurian, Ukrainian, or Polish hailing from the Vilnius area. The immigrant populace felt no connection with the tradition or history of the place, which could often be seen in the new inhabitants' lack of responsibility towards local resources. These communities were also characterised by a variety of folklore, cultures, and traditions, which often led to conflict. In 1945, almost 80% of the buildings in Lidzbark Warmiński were burned or ruined due to the war. The transformation which began in Poland after 1989 also played a part – many state-owned employers were liquidated, resulting in mounting unemployment and the ensuing impoverishment of the society, which over the years began to take on a chronic character.⁵ The social consequences of this today are worrying [*Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji...* 2016]. The result of this may be migration of (especially young) people out of the cities, and a decline of local potential.⁶

The Cittaslow concept thus presents itself as a key strategy of strengthening the inhabitants' local identity, and indirectly combating negative social phenomena. The ethnic variety is seen as an advantage, which can be used for social integration, and at the same time as a value which fits well with the 'good living city' ideology.

Lidzbark Warmiński joined the Cittaslow structure in 2006 and has been experiencing quite rapid development in recent years, connected with the implementation of the participation objectives. It thus became the subject of academic interest.⁷ The city could be considered a recent informal leader in the regional promotion of the Slow idea.

Strengthening local identity can be achieved on many levels with various methods. The table below presents the main areas which directly or indirectly impact the inhabitants' sense of local identity. The table also includes examples of actions in those areas taken in Lidzbark Warmiński.

⁴ www.stat.gov.pl.

⁵ As of 31 December 2017, the unemployment rate in Lidzbark Warmiński reached 12.90%. www.stat.gov.pl.

⁶ The internal migration balance in Lidzbark Warmiński in 2015, 2016, and 2017 was negative, and amounted to, respectively: -25, -60, and -29. www.stat.gov.pl.

⁷ The development of Lidzbark Warmiński is discussed at length in the monograph: E. Strzelecka (Ed.), 2017, *Alternatywne modele rozwoju miast. Sieć miast Cittaslow, Wydanie II rozszerzone*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Łódzkiej, Łódź.

Table 1. Areas of activity impacting the sense of local identity, and their examples in Lidzbark Warmiński

Type of activity	Example
Activity in architecture and urban planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reconstruction of the historical City Hall, conservation of city walls, which are a historical structure
Revitalising areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reconstruction of the city amphitheatre
Organisation of cultural events, historical festivals, and other undertakings to promote the city	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> historical reconstructions of the Battle of Heilsberg, projects for a reconstruction of an Old Prussian settlement of Lecbarg, or a 19th century craft village from Napoleonic times creation of a Local Digital Archive
Organisation of meetings to promote cultural, natural and culinary heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Cooperative “Rokosz” offering free lectures on city history folk dance group “Perła Warmii” teaching classes in historical methods of producing traditional Warmian women’s caps
Meetings of the inhabitants and representatives of city government, allowing for unrestricted discussion and communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> city hall meetings, which include the citizens in important processes, such as revitalisation
Operations of local organisations and associations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The “Dom Warmiński” association, which promotes the creation of cultural and touristic routes “Friends of the Land of Lidzbark” association, whose project is to reconstruct a 19th century village from Napoleonic times
Environmental protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> retrofitting city residential buildings for energy efficiency
Offering opportunities for the pursuit of hobbies and diverse leisure activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> plans to adapt areas for leisure use (e.g. the banks of the Lyna River), creating educational trails and attractive places to rest

Source: own research, based on [*Lokalny Program Rewitalizacji...* 2016].

In realising all the initiatives, the inhabitants’ opinion is a significant element since they are the main recipients of all the undertakings. The results of a survey conducted among the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński are discussed in the remainder of this article.

5. Opinions of the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński – survey results

The project involved conducting field research with the use of a survey questionnaire. Data were gathered with direct paper-and-pencil interviews (PAPI), as well as computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI). The survey was conducted from 5 January to 30 March 2019. Sample selection was done through non-probability sampling, i.e. quota sampling segmented by variables such as age and sex. The sample size was 148 individuals. The survey differentiated six age groups: 15-19 (8 people), 20-24 (10 people), 25-39 (37 people), 40-54 (35 people), 55-69

(38 people), and 70 and above (20 people). The general population structure requirement was fulfilled, meaning that the sample can be seen as representative of the entire community regarding the selected characteristics. Quota sampling does not permit definite conclusions about the entire population, but structure preservation does allow treating this survey as an important insight into the inhabitants' opinion.

The survey consisted of 17 questions, 12 of which were closed-ended questions (including three conditional questions), four semi-open-ended questions, and one open-ended question. For most questions a 5-point Likert scale was used to assess the attitudes of the respondents, which is a standard method of measuring societal dispositions towards specific problems or opinions.

In the survey, the respondents were first asked whether they identify with their place of residence, i.e. Lidzbark Warmiński. Almost half of the respondents declared that they strongly identify with their city (46.62%). The same proportion answered that they "rather agree". Only 2.70% of the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński responded that they "rather do not identify" with their city, while 4.05% answered that it is difficult to tell. In the next part of the survey, the respondents were asked to give their opinion as to the degree to which historical events experienced by the region of Warmia and Mazury (war, relocations, destruction of monuments and cultural values, and other elements shaping the unique landscape of these places) influenced the inhabitants' sense of local identity. Over half of the respondents answered that this influence was strong (58.11%). One-fifth of the respondents (20.27%) considered the influence very strong, 16.89% – that it was average, 3.38% – weak, while 1.35% thought those events had no such influence.

In this context, it is crucial to diagnose what the "sense of local identity" means to the inhabitants. Figure 1 presents the respondents' answers.⁸

The survey results indicate that the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński identify to the greater extent with the city itself than does the region's population (the summary ratio of the votes in the two subgroups was 282 to 129). Nevertheless, a significant majority of the respondents (81.08%) shared the opinion that the local identity felt by inhabitants is a factor in city development. Only 6.76% were of the opposing view, while 12.16% indicated that this was difficult to tell. Among the respondents who answered affirmatively, 35% considered the factor very important, while 62.5% considered it important. Only three people in total viewed this factor as of average, little, or very little importance.

All the aspects contributing to the understanding of local identity, its perception and strengthening, are subjectively selected and organised by the inhabitants. Hence it is crucial to determine what sorts of actions increase the sense of local identity in the people of Lidzbark Warmiński.⁹ The figure 2 presents the responses to this question.¹⁰

⁸ The surveyed inhabitants could indicate up to three aspects which they considered most important.

⁹ In the survey questions referring to this issue, if specificity was required, an example was given of an undertaking or initiative being realised in Lidzbark Warmiński, according to the information contained in Table 1.

¹⁰ The surveyed inhabitants could indicate up to three aspects which they considered most important.

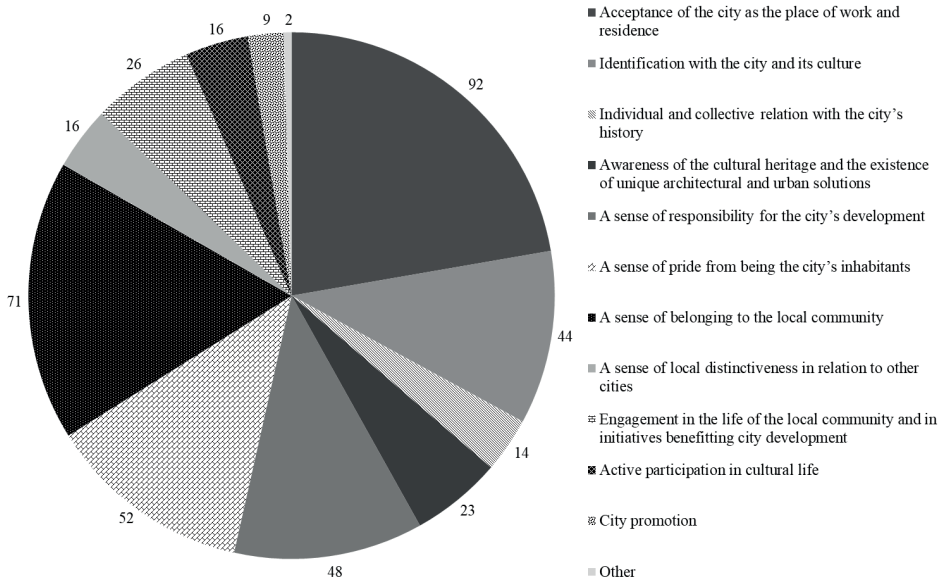


Fig. 1. Sense of local identity of the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński

Source: own analysis and research.

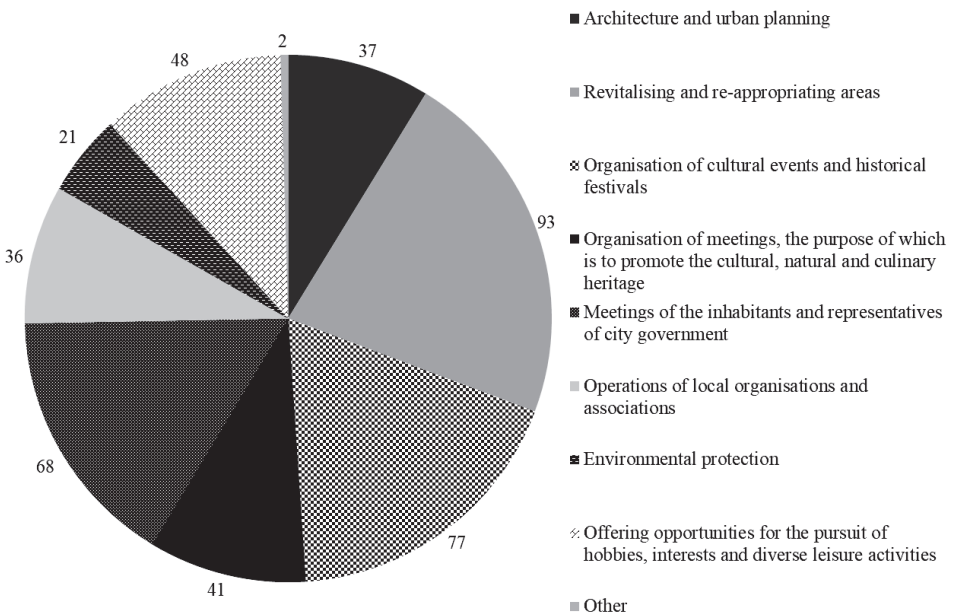


Fig. 2. Actions increasing the sense of local identity of the inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński

Source: own analysis and research.

Most respondents (58.78%) held the opinion that it is up to the municipal authorities to initiate local identity-building projects. Less than a quarter of those surveyed gave that role to the inhabitants, while 17.57% saw this aspect as equal in the view of both sides. In this context, the inhabitants' opinion about cultural events promoting local traditions and values is especially pertinent. The quality and diversity of such events was mostly judged as "good" (52.03%) or "very good" (33.11%). 12.85% of respondents judged them as "average", while "bad" or "very bad" were the answers of, respectively, 1.35% and 0.68% of those surveyed. A decisive majority of respondents (71.62%) answered that the frequency of these events is satisfactory.

The next part of the survey was devoted to aspects of the Cittaslow movement. The first question established whether respondents were aware that Lidzbark Warmiński belonged to that network of cities, and 77.7% of the respondents (115 people) answered affirmatively.¹¹ Of those, 55.65% declared having little knowledge of Cittaslow and the slow living movement, while others (44.35%) declared they "know a lot about it". Knowledge of Lidzbark Warmiński's operation within the Cittaslow structure, or as part of the Polish Cittaslow Network was declared at similar levels. Over half of the inhabitants (59.13%) declared knowing "little", 39.13% indicated that they know "a lot", while 1.74% declared they "know nothing about this subject".

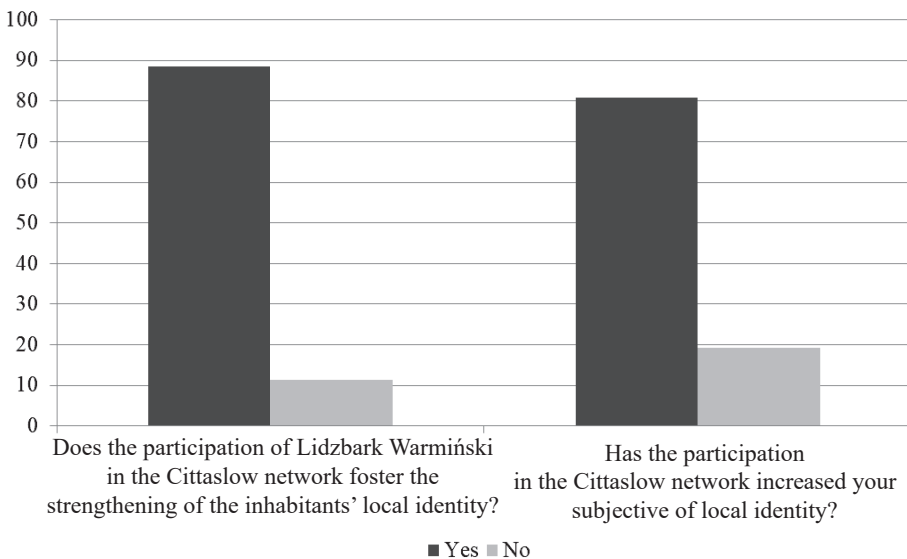


Fig. 3. Lidzbark Warmiński's participation in Cittaslow network vs. the inhabitants' local identity

Source: own analysis and research.

¹¹ The respondents who declared having no knowledge of the subject did not answer the five subsequent questions, which referred directly to the role of the Cittaslow idea in Lidzbark Warmiński.

A key question in the survey was whether the inhabitants consider the membership of Lidzbark Warmiński in the network to have influenced the subjective sense of local identity. The responses (%) are presented in Figure 3.

A decisive majority of the respondents positively assessed the role of the Cittaslow concept in relation to the people's local identity. Over 80% declared that the city's participation in the network strengthened their subjective sense of local identity, among those 59.14% indicated that this was the case to a large degree, 22.58% – to a very large degree, 17.2% – to an average degree and 1.08% – to a small degree.

In the cities of the former East Prussia, where local identity has been disrupted by historical discontinuity, identifying barriers to building a bond between the inhabitants and the given region is of great importance. According to the survey's respondents, the greatest such barrier are social problems (e.g. unemployment, poverty), which was indicated by 116 respondents.¹² Demographic conditions (e.g. emigration of young people from the city) were placed a close second, indicated by 107 respondents. Other barriers included infrastructural and architectural barriers (46 votes), low or lacking involvement of the inhabitants in associations and non-profit organisations (45 votes), inadequate local identity-building initiatives by the municipal authorities (31 votes) and the low attractiveness of city-promoting initiatives (18 votes).

6. Conclusions

The surveyed inhabitants of Lidzbark Warmiński identify with their city in spite of knowing that this sense is affected by the region's turbulent history. The respondents' local identity is mostly expressed in their perceptions, and in the subjective sense and understanding of the issue, rather than in practical actions such as involvement in the affairs of the local community. Furthermore, those surveyed identified more with the city itself than with the local community.

The Cittaslow concept seems to be an effective framework for strengthening the bond between the inhabitants and their place of residence. Both the city's participation in the structure and the inhabitants' subjective feelings on that participation were reported as positive. However, Lidzbark Warmiński is now faced with the not unimportant challenge of further strengthening, or at least maintaining such a bond between the city and its people. As evident from the survey responses, social problems are the greatest barriers to that goal. A high level of unemployment, poverty and weakening labour market participation may lead to a diminishing socio-economic sphere, due to external competition and the adverse situation in neighbouring municipalities. This, in turn, may lead to an outflow of (especially young) people from the city and to a reduction of local potential and of the bond between the people and the region.

¹² The surveyed inhabitants could indicate up to three barriers which they considered most important.

The conclusions above are far from exhaustive of the subject of strengthening local identity in Lidzbark Warmiński according to the Slow idea, and many aspects require further in-depth analyses. However, the conducted survey provided a substantial insight into the inhabitants' opinions and may provide a point of departure for further research.

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